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*Project File.  
of real time  
piece*

17 February 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Real Time Readout

REFERENCE: USIB-D-46. 4/3 (COMIREX-D-13. 7/4),  
5 January 1968, [redacted]

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1. I have been told that you and some other senior members of the intelligence community believe that a real time readout satellite reconnaissance system would be the answer to our problems of indications and early warning of a strategic attack on the United States. I believe that such a statement, without extensive caveats and qualifications, may be misleading. It would be more correct to say that, while the real time readout system would be an extremely valuable reconnaissance medium and would have a unique capability in many crisis situations, only in the most exceptional circumstance would it be likely to provide any information bearing on Soviet preparation for an intercontinental strategic attack against the United States which might be launched within a few hours.

2. In the original paper on real time readout COMIREX was required to address the so-called warning/indications problem. During the development of the paper, however, we began to identify and appreciate broader applications and advantages which were more realistic in terms of actual requirements and a value for dollar return than any hope that such a reconnaissance system could solve the indications and warning problem.

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NRO review(s)

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3. The concept of a real time readout system that we had in mind at the time we wrote the COMIREX paper which went to USIB in January 1968 was developed after months of interchange with the NRO Staff and has been subject to considerable additional study since that time. Such a system would be an excellent tool for the intelligence community. It might well be the main reconnaissance system used to satisfy most of our problems and supplemented by specialized recoverable systems only whenever it became necessary to solve problems involving unusually high resolution or unusually broad area coverage. This system could probably give us excellent and timely information bearing on the preparation of any Soviet campaign which might involve prior activity on the part of Soviet ground and naval forces and, to a lesser extent, Soviet tactical air forces. This system would also be an extremely flexible tool to use against a wide variety of intelligence problems involving routine surveillance and through near continuous coverage would extend our ability to study the dynamics of important Soviet activities at various test ranges and at military units. Officials of ACDA have told us that it would satisfy about 90 percent of the problems that they expect in the area of disarmament inspection. The Army is interested in the application of this system to support of tactical forces in a conventional war and this could be done without detriment to the strategic role outlined above. The Navy is also interested in the possible application of this system to the problem of sea surveillance, although if this task were added to the mission of the readout system it would probably be necessary to design the system with the capability to cover a wide area at low resolution as well as the normal capability of covering a small area at high resolution.

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4. In summary, real time readout is demonstrably a valuable asset in terms of the majority of our present and predictable reconnaissance objectives, including the ability to develop a baseline on which to evaluate indications; support of real time readout, solely on the basis of early warning, would be precarious.

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Chairman  
Committee on Imagery Requirements and Exploitation

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